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REVOLUTIONARY RHETORIC AND AFGHAN WOMEN

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Occasional Paper #23







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BACKGROUND

Afghan leaders have addressed themselves to the subject of reform for women for a hundred years. These spokesmen, predominantly male, have held that a nationalist ideology encompassing emancipation for women is essential to the creation of a progressive image for the nation.

Amir Abdur Rahman (1880-1901) introduced many laws in an attempt to align customary social practices with the prescriptions of Islam. He forbade child marriages, forced marriages, the leverite, exorbitant bride prices and marriage gifts. He restored hereditary rights to widows and ruled that women could seek divorce. He granted freedom in case of non-support and authorized the mehr (marriage gift) according to the dictates of the Quran. However, he also imposed the death penalty for adulterous women (which is contrary to the Quran) and decreed that men were entitled to full control over their women because "... the honor of the people of Afghanistan consists in the honor of their women."[1]

Contradictions between religion, custom and reform have plagued the feminist movement in Afghanistan since its inception.

The concept that women should be considered as contributing members of society beyond motherhood was first introduced during the reign of Amir Habibullah (1901-1919). Mahmud Beg Tarzi argued against overly protective restrictions on women and for education, pleading that egalitarian Islam does not deny women education and that it is an Islamic duty to provide them with the opportunity to function fully in the society. Only with educated women in the home, he said, could the family remain strong and the nation progress. To bolster his arguments he published accounts of famous women through history in his newspaper Seraj ul-Akhbar.[2]

The religious leaders read Tarzi's essays with growing displeasure. They contended that education for women would lead to the breakdown of the family, sexual anarchy, and ultimately degrade women. The honor of the nation would be lost.

Conservative aversion erupted into open revolt as King Amanullah (1919-1929) attempted to institutionalize reforms for women. Despite Amir Abdur Rahman's efforts, unjust customary practices persisted. Amanullah, therefore, once again pressed to abolish child marriages, forced marriages, the leverite and to assure widows' rights. Exorbitant marriage gifts were ordered curtailed. In addition, Amanullah attempted to go further by advocating monogamy, the removal of the veil, the end of seclusion and compulsory education for girls.[3]

Amanullah's Queen, Soraya, and his sister, Seraj ul-Banat, were the first Afghan women to speak out publically on the subject. They had learned their lessons well from the liberal-minded men around them. Speaking in 1923, Seraj ul-Banat said: "Some people are laughing at us, saying that women know only how to eat and drink. Old women discourage young women by saying their mothers never starved to death because they could not read or write. ... But knowledge is not man's monoploy. Women also deserve to be knowledgeable. We must on the one hand bring up healthy children and, on the other hand, help men in their work. We must read about famous women in this world, to know that women can achieve exactly what men can achieve."[4]

Queen Soraya, the daughter of Mahmud Beg Tarzi, spoke to women during the 1926 Jeshyn (Independence Celebrations) even more forthrightly: "Independence has been achieved. It belongs to all of us. ... Do not think, however, that our nation needs only men to serve it. Women should also take part as women did in the early years of Islam. The valuable services rendered by women are recounted throughout history from which we learn that women were not created solely for pleasure and comfort. From their examples we learn that we must all contribute toward the development of our nation and that this cannot be done without being equipped with knowledge. So, we should all attempt to acquire as much knowledge as possible in order that we may render our services to society in the manner of the women of early Islam."[5]

In spite of such references to Islamic heroines the conservatives would have nothing of it. The Khost Rebellion (March 1924-January 1925) was their first overt protest. In 1929 conservative religious and tribal leaders spearheaded the revolution which overthrew King Amanullah.

To restore the sanctity of Islam and the honor of the nation, Amanullah's successor, Habibullah Ghazi (Bacha Saqqao; 17 January-13 October 1929), insisted upon a return to reactionary customs regarding women. He demanded that women remain behind the veil under strict male control and that the girls' schools together with all other vestiges of the women's movement be suspended.

For the next 30 years, under Nadir Shah (1929-1933) and his son, Zahir Shah, until 1959, women continued to remain in seclusion and wore the chadri (veil). Nevertheless, the concept that women should participate in national development was reintroduced as a national policy. Separate schools were established and education for women gradually gained respectability. Women were employed in professions considered appropriate for them, as teachers, medical personnel and administrators in female institutions.

When, therefore, the government of Prime Minister Daoud (1953-1963) launched a revolution for women in 1959 by announcing its support of the voluntary removal of the veil and an end to seclusion, Afghan women were well-prepared to take their place in multifaceted activities. Conservative elements in the society who protested were jailed and challenged to provide positive Quranic proof, not interpretations, for their objections.[6] None were forthcoming and the evolutionary processes toward emancipation began.

Women were automatically enfranchised, without a suffragette movement, by the 1964 Constitution which stated that all Afghans "without discrimination or preference, have equal rights and obligations before the law." Among other things this constitution guaranteed women "dignity, compulsory education and freedom to work."

Over the years increasing numbers of educated women emerged to work in government and business, as secretaries and judges, hair dressers and diplomats, entertainers and parliamentarians. Women were employed in some factories, including ceramics, fruit packaging, pharmaceuticals and housing construction. At no time, however, were women expected to engage in public manual labor. Women in Afghanistan have never carried bricks and buckets of cement on their heads or performed menial tasks in the streets.

The direction was positive and steady, but because of the government's insistence on the voluntary acceptance of change, the numbers were small in terms of the total female population and largely confined to the middle and upper strata of urban communities. Still, the society as a whole became gradually reconciled to women's participation in the totality of the society.

Undercurrents of dissent existed. In 1968 conservative members of parliament proposed to enact a law prohibiting Afghan girls from studying abroad. Hundreds of demonstrating girls vociferously brought their constitutional guarantee of equal rights to the attention of the parliamentarians. Soon after this, in 1970, two conservative mullahs protested such public evidence of female liberation as mini-skirts, women teachers and school girls by shooting at the legs of women dressed in Western dress and splashing them with acid. In April, 5000 girls fearful that the legal system, dominated by males who were often conservatives, would prove too lenient, spontaneously took to the streets of Kabul. These first demonstrations by women were early indications that a women's consciousness was developing; an initial statement that women should be considered a viable force with potential leadership.

Progress continued without further strident demonstrations, but at the same time age-old customary beliefs and customs prevailed, even among the enlightened. The Government of the Republic of Afghanistan, founded by Mohammad Daoud (1973), attempted to redress specific problems through a Penal Code (1976) and a Civil Law (1977), both of which followed the constitutional injunction that: "There can be no law repugnant to the basic principles of the sacred religion of Islam..."

The laws included the familiar articles against child marriages, forced marriages and abandonment. They protected inheritance and expressly declared the mehr to be "the property of the wife" (Civil Law, 110). Yet, numbers of sex-discriminating social customs favorable to male dominance in matters such as divorce, adultery and the defense of honor were perpetuated by their entrenchment in these legal statutes.

Many attitudes reflected in the laws, both positive and negative, had been the subject of argument between Muslim traditionalists and modernists for centuries. The contradictions became most destructive in families which encouraged partial emancipation while insisting on patriarchal control as an ideal. To encourage a girl to seek education and then deny her the right to exercise her choice to work outside the home and select her marriage partner naturally fostered incipient rebellion.

This insistance on patriarchal control arose in part from the fact that in Afghanistan women symbolize honor, of the nation and the family. Any deviation from honorable behavior on the part of the women as it is defined by any given family or group is seen to besmirch the honor of those in authority and can not, therefore, be tolerated. It is this attitude which has perpetuated overly protective institutions and customs, such as the veil and seclusion.

However, by placing women on such an exalted symbolic pinnacle it then behooves men to respect those who behave with honor. Respect for women is, indeed, a genuine personality trait in Afghan males and a basic element in traditional Afghan male-female relationships. Observers from sophisticated Islamic cities such as Tehran have, in the past, remarked with wonder that attractive, young, unaccompanied females were able to walk through the streets of Kabul without being subjected to abusive stares, vulgar remarks and jostling.

Few Afghan women wished to destroy this. But many did begin to ask for a more precise definition, in modern terms, of exactly what constitutes honorable behavior on their part. After all, women had been asked to contribute to national development and enhance the image of a progressive Afghanistan. They had accepted this ideology presented to them by men and responded with distinction, functioning with poise and dignity, with no loss of honor to themselves or to their families, and with much credit to the nation. They had proved the correctness of the modernist contention that there is nothing inconsistent with modesty and full participation.

But as they became increasingly aware of the importance of their roles, women also began to examine their opportunities as individuals rather than stereotypes or national symbols. They longed to be released from the strictures of family consensus and given the right to determine crucial life-crises decisions as individuals. They began to articulate goals in conflict with male-oriented ideals.

The government, despite assistance and safeguards, was still unable, and unwilling, to insist on breaking restrictions imposed by the family which continued to be the single most important institution in Afghan society. Family attitudes, not government guarantees, decided the future of girls.

Furthermore, laws favoring women were indifferently enforced and as more and more women entered the work force, competition caused indifference and resentment to surface. Positions of responsibility and power were occasionally offered to women, but disproportionately to the female work force. Criticisms of sex discrimination and tokenism were raised, but the women themselves lacked dynamic leadership. By the end of the 1970s, skepticism and cynicism were pervasive and the emancipation movement was labeled a purely cosmetic sham which the power elite espoused for their own aggrandizement and perpetuation.

In truth stagnation had set in and changes were needed. Although all but a few deplored the violence which accompanied the establishment of the leftist Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) on 27 April 1978,[7] many looked forward with anticipation to new programs unshackled by precedent.

DAOW (Democratic Organization of Afghan Women): April-July 1978

On the women's front, however, a sense of unease set in early. Within 12 days the Revolutionary Council's "Basic Line of the Revolutionary Duties of the Government of the DRA" was broadcast over Radio Afghanistan. Article 12 ensured "equality of rights of women and men in all social, economic, political, cultural and civic aspects."[8] The abrogated constitutions of 1964 and 1977 had made identical blanket assurances.

Party leaders offered little concrete in the way of articulating expectations or specifying action-oriented programs to implement Article 12. Dr. Anahita Ratebzad, member of the Revolutionary Council and Minister of Social Affairs was among the ablest, most dynamic members of the new leadership. On 10 May she made a major address to her staff and Kabul's teachers in which she pledged to translate Article 12 into action and described the "duties of women and mothers, who shape the future of the country ... to bring up sons and daughters who are sincere and patriotic ... and take steps to consolidate your revolutionary regime as bravely as the heroic and brave men of this country." (11 May 1978)[9]

It was not surprising to find that women were being called to participate in political action, but it was disappointing to note that women were still being assigned primarily culture-bound stereotyped roles as mothers duty-bound to fulfill supportive roles for family and nation.

Afghan history and folklore is replete with idealized accounts and legends of heroic mothers and wives who provided inspiration to their menfolk in times of crisis. If the ideal personality type for Afghan men is the warrior-poet, a lauded personality type for Afghan women is the poet-heroine. The names of these heroines studded the rhetoric as the DRA attempted to mobilize Afghan women.

Many were mothers whose sagacity inspired their famous sons and whose inspirational poems furthered nationalistic causes. Among these famous mothers were Nazo, mother of Mir Wais Hotak (1709-1715) who removed the yoke of the Persian Safavids, and Zarghoona, mother of Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747-1772), who founded an empire. Women who defied the customs which proscribed education for women in the harems were also extolled. Zaynab, daughter of Mir Wais Hotak, was a scholar in both Pashto and Dari. She wrote, taught, acted as political adviser and stood with her brothers at the bastion of Kandahar when the city was besieged in 1783 by Persia's Nadir Afshar. Spina Herawi, Aisha Durrani, Amana Fedawi and Mastoora Ghori are among those remembered as accomplished poetesses illuminating the courts and harems of the past. Rabia Balkhi (10th century) who wrote a poem on her prison wall in her own blood to condemn the injustice of being denied the right to marry the man of her choice, is particularly beloved.

Then there are the heroines of the battlefield who inspired armies with daring acts and stirring couplets. Malalay, the most oft quoted of these fighting heroines rallied Afghan troops in the battle against the British at Maiwand near Kandahar in 1880, and Ghazi Ade rescued the flag of a dying mujahideen (freedom fighter) opposing the British in Kabul during the 2nd Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880). These are the types of poet-heroines who have been revered through history for their individuality, patriotism, duty and courage in transcending the controls imposed upon them.

The DRA held up these women as models, pointing out that: "Women have always been prominent in politics and social struggles, like Rabia, Malalay, Zarghoona and Aisha." (3 July 1978) The rhetoric stressed the obligation of women to identify with these heroines, but the rights due women remained amorphous even though functions were held almost daily during the Saur (April) Revolution in girls' schools throughout Kabul.

The lengthy speeches rang with scathing condemnations against the tyranny, injustice, corruption, torture and lack of attention that had been the "hallmarks of the defunct regime" under which "thousands upon thousands of women had lived in dark homes and humid caves, with no ear to hear their cries of anguish, no heart to beat for them," as Dr. Anahita phrased it. (11 May 1978) The defunct regimes, said Sultana Omaid, Director of Kabul Girls' Schools, "had championed women's rights for purely demagogic reasons, flouting the prestige of Afghan women and weakening their creativity through deprivation and oppression." (25 June 1978) "Now," said Soraya, President of DOAW, "all injustices and slavery have been eliminated, and Afghan mothers can rear heroes and heroines like Malalay." "Now," said Rohafza Kamyar, Principal of the DOAW's Vocational High School, "society belongs to us and we belong to society and it is up to us to make efforts to our last breath for the realization of the aspirations of the people." (5 June 1978) They did not say how. The meetings ended with the chanting of slogans calling "death to the bloody hangmen." (22 May 1978)

All revolutionaries must downgrade their predecessors in order to justify their actions. From the beginning, however, these totally negative harangues sounded slightly hollow in light of the fact that it was the very women who heaped vituperation on past leaders who had benefitted most from the movement those leaders initiated.

The most prominent speakers during the early months had been active in education and medecine for many years, as principals and administrators with positions of responsibility. The career of Dr. Anahita exemplifies the development of these revolutionary women. She was born in October 1931, the daughter of Ahmad Rateb, a journalist who fell into disfavor and died about 1935, some say in exile, others in prison, in Kabul. Her mother, a half-sister of Mahmud Beg Tarzi but outside the elitist society, became a nursemaid in the home of Shah Mahmud, brother of King Nadir.

"Anahita" whose birthname was Naheda was, however, educated and graduated from the 8th grade at Malalay Girl's School in Kabul in 1945. The next year she entered nursing school. In 1950 she graduated from a nursing school in the United States and was then appointed Director of Nursing at Kabul's Women's Hospital where she also taught nursing. In 1957 she entered the Medical College at Kabul University and joined its teaching staff upon graduation in 1963. Along with three other women, Anahita stood for, and won, election to the Wolesi Jirgah (Lower House) of the 12th Parliament as a candidate from Kabul City for the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The 1965 elections marked the beginning of an experiment in constitutional monarchy when numbers of liberal and leftist newcomers appeared in the political arena. Anahita marched in the vanguard.

Dr. Anahita had joined Noor Mohammad Taraki's leftist PDPA after it was launched on 1 January 1965. During the period of a relatively free press (1965-1973) she wrote for the weekly Parcham (first published on 14 March 1968) until it was banned in July 1969. Her major assignment within the PDPA, however, was the formation of the DOAW (Democratic Organization of Afghan Women) in 1965 to counter the establishment's Women's Welfare Association, a non-political organization offering education and employment opportunities to women, among other supportive activities (established in 1946). The PDPA accused the Welfare Association of being run by aristocratic women for their personal satisfaction without concern for the real issues facing women.

Dr. Anahita was rewarded for her loyal party work in 1976 when she was appointed to the Central Committee of the PDPA, and reelected in 1977. After the Saur Revolution she was elected to the Revolutionary Council of the DRA and appointed Minister of Social Affairs.

Dr. Anahita Ratebzad, therefore, symbolizes the success women could achieve after the evolutionary emancipation movement was initiated in 1959. On the other hand, one can understand her rancour toward the elitists for she had also been the victim of the type of shabby treatment metted out to women by the old society. Because her widowed mother had been taken into the home of the royal family, Anahita grew up as the plaything of princes, but when it came to marriage she was married off to the family doctor, some say to pay his bills. Therefore, she represents also those women experiencing the frustrating contradictions inherent in emancipation stymied by family strictures and entrenched social customs.

There is no denying Anahita's charm, ability and enthusiastic energy. From the day of her appointment she was indefatigable, visiting welfare centers, schools, kindergartens and medical facilities. She received the women's delegations from the provinces and to one and all she articulated the Party's concern to eradicate the discriminations of the past.

By the end of May 1978 a few hints as to the direction women's programs might take began to surface through the condemnatory rhetoric. The expansion of kindergartens was given first place and the "democratization of social life" through the restoration of the rights and privileges of women was hailed as a major task. Those "privileges which women, by right, must have are equal education, job security, health services and free time to rear a healthy generation for building the future of this country ... Educating and enlightening women is now the subject of close government attention." (Editorial, 28 May 1978)

The National Agency for the Campaign Against Illiteracy (NACAI), accused of ineffectiveness since its establishment in 1969, was slated for reorganization "to teach people the aims of the Revolution and how to meet these goals." (26 June 1978)

Week-long seminars were held to familiarize teachers with the new literacy and the techniques of "enlightening the masses." (9 July 1978). In July 1978, it was reported that 19,672 were registered in literacy programs, 1616 of whom were women.

Those who knew Dr. Anahita in those days had confidence in her leadership and great hopes that the Ministry of Social Affairs would provide the necessary means to implement positive programs. Internal power struggles between the two factions within the PDPA, Khalq (Masses) and Parcham (Banner), ended these hopes. Parcham lost and on 12 July 1978, only three months after she had come to power, Dr. Anahita left Kabul to become Ambassador to Yugoslavia. Her lover, Babrak Karmal (then Deputy Prime Minister), and other members of the Parcham leadership were similarly dispatched. When they later refused to return home they were purged from the PDPA and branded as counter-revolutionary conspirators plotting to pervert the Saur Revolution.

Prime Minister Nur Mahammad Taraki and his First Minister Hafizullah Amin set out to consolidate Khalq power.[10]

KOAW (Khalq Organization of Afghan Women): July 1978-December 1979

Dr. Anahita's expulsion was a loss. Her Ministry of Social Affairs was dissolved, "since it was not needed," according to Taraki (18 October 1978) and women's affairs were relegated to the Ministry of Education. Women prominent in the DAOW no longer made public appearances. No woman was appointed to subsequent cabinets or to any other substantive position. Mrs. Taraki and Mrs. Amin only rarely appeared at functions. Neither functioned in the forefront of the political scene; they primarily fulfilled ceremonial roles. Following the pattern set by past regimes, they graciously received flowers and opened exhibitions of needlework.

The Khalq government did not ignore women. Taraki, speaking to Polish journalists in September 1978 stated: "The people's state not only protects the women's movement but will also carry on intensive and effective struggles to equalize the rights of women with those of men. Afghan women from now on are free in the real sense of the word and have equal rights with men." (26 September 1978) Admirable sentiments, but he did not elaborate on how their lot had improved since the Saur Revolution, nor speculate regarding specific programs.

An avowed PDPA objective "to awaken the political consciousness of women" was, however, vigorously promoted. This period begins the purposeful manipulation of the women's movement as an appendage to national politics by a leadership attempting to establish legitimacy and consolidate its power. Public demonstrations were ordered to build up popular support and morale.

The DAOW was renamed the Khalqi Organization of Afghan Women (KOAW) with Dilara Mahak, formerly Principal of Amana Fedawi School, as President. The KOAW, now functioning in close association with the Khalqi Organization of Afghan Youth (KOAY), actively rounded up women to attend "grand functions" or gather in the streets to participate in "grand marches" shouting "hurrah, hurrah," and slogans condemning "the reactionary plotters" and supporting the "Glorious Saur Revolution" while they waved huge posters of "our Great Leader," Taraki. Frequently these grand marches ended in "volunteer clean-up" sessions and the people of Kabul were treated for the first time to the novel sight of girls wielding brooms sweeping the streets in public in the company of men. (29 October 1978) So much time was consumed in meeting, marching and "volunteering" that little constructive planning was possible.

Women were extremely visible in the press, receiving promotion awards or certificates following short refresher courses in traditionally accepted women's fields such as education and health.

Glowing reports of KOAW successes in carrying out its directive to revitalize and organize new women's groups in all parts of the country were frequently published. The announced goal was to absorb 12,000 women and the KOAW was reported to "now have complete influence among toiling women." (8 March 1979)

The small clandestine cells organized in the pre-DRA years in governmental and educational institutions and among youth groups had been directed to spread discontent by constantly harping on discriminatory practices and the ineffectual disregard evidenced by the power elite. The girls who joined these cells came from various backgrounds. Ages ranged between 18 and 30, with many school girls represented, particularly from Kabul University. The majority were unmarried but wives of officials and housewives also participated. The Khalq faction tended to draw members from the middle class and minority groups, predominantly in urban provincial centers. They were educated and employed, but not often in high-level positions.

Parcham members were from more liberal elitist families and mainly from Kabul, although some landed gentry from the provinces were also represented. Most were highly educated and numbers had traveled abroad because of their affluence. Many held important positions in government because their higher social status provided them with better contacts inside the Establishment.

Their reasons for joining were as varied as their backgrounds. In pre-DRA days when legislation permitting political parties was held in abeyance there was only the Establishment and the left. Moderate liberals were not organized. The frustrated and the activists opposed to the Establishment had only the left to turn to and in these parties individuals were more important than ideology. Women gathered around charismatic personalities like Dr. Anahita. Male party members were influential in recruiting female members. One of Taraki's most oft quoted statements regarding women was that men and women are like "the two wings of a bird"(8 March 1979); in order to fly, both wings must move and no great movement can achieve victory without the participation of women, because they form half of the society. (23 August 1979) It was incumbent upon male party members, therefore, to enlist the cooperation of the women in their families.

Still others were persuaded to join by their friends. Others joined because of general dissatisfaction, usually with unsatisfactory personal male-female relationships at home. The young were particularly attracted by promises of loosening parental control.

Most had no ideological reasons for joining. They joined for the sheer excitement of doing something different, of defying their elders. At first it was daring to associate with suspect PDPA members. In addition, the meetings provided an alternative to cloistered family-chaperoned outings. Party meetings were mixed and it was considered perfectly acceptable for boys to invite girls - and even for girls to invite boys - to these meetings. In addition, Parcham meetings presided over by Dr. Anahita and Babrak Karmal were famous for ending in lively disco parties.

These disco parties were particularly attractive in the late 1960s and early 1970s when a plethora of night clubs and discotheques flourished in Kabul. These public clubs were expensive and mainly patronized by the social elite. Middle class youth could not afford them nor did their families consider them suitable places for their

children. The PDPA meetings provided these youth with an alternative and the psychological satisfaction of being "mod" and "with it." Certainly these meetings were more fun than family picnics.

Much attention was paid to organization. Each institution, including the DOAW, had inner committees responsible for the indoctrination of specific sections inside government ministries and city wards. Close links were maintained with the center, which issued the directives. The members were instructed to establish control over their sections and play up latent female frustrations in order to increase membership.

After the PDPA gained power it became fashionable to join; however, less palatable reasons arose. Prospective members were lured by promises of good positions and promotion. Conversely, those who hesitated were threatened with demotion or dismissal, or even denouncement and arrest.[11] Daughters whose parents objected to their going out unchaperoned threatened to turn in their parents for hindering the revolution by keeping them from party meetings. Small girls were told that if they joined the youth groups they would be cleansed of the stigma of having parents who had associated with past regimes. As members of the party they could grow up with pride as true daughters of the revolution dedicated to the service of the motherland.

None of these reasons, coercive or otherwise, had much to do with ideology or the practical furtherance of an emancipation movement. There was little perception that women should be given the opportunity to develop into a distinct group capable of defining problems specifically related to women and should possess socio-economic-political power to solve these problems. The ideology was still being provided by men and the women's movement was obligated to share common political goals.

A principal task assigned to the KOAW by the Khalqi leadership was the eradication of illiteracy, in Kabul and the provincial centers. "The roots of rotten customs and traditions are nurtured in ignorance," they preached. (18 October 1978) Khalqi spokesmen Afghanized Lenin's dogma that "An illiterate person stands outside politics, he must first learn his ABC. Without that there can be no politics..."[12], by claiming that "an illiterate woman can not carry on the struggle, can not handle properly the family affairs, and cannot rear properly sound and healthy children." A jihad (holy war) against illiteracy" was called. (8 March 1979)

Women, therefore, were primarily enlisted to continue their traditional sex-oriented occupations as teachers "to extend civic and political education to women, to enable women to understand their rights and responsibilities, to equip them with epoch-making ideology of the working class." (10 March 1979) Instead of beginning the lessons with A,B,C, however, Lesson #1 literally began with P,D,P,A in the Persian script. Marxist ideology dominated the curriculum.[13] The practical non-formal-education teaching materials developed a few years previously were shelved.

The heavy-handed tactics used by the Khalq cadres harassed this politically vulnerable group and stiffened the opposition. In spite of the fact that Taraki told a group of journalists that we "have in no case enrolled women by force. Not even a single one." (3 May 1979), countless refugees pouring into Pakistan at this time listed the forceful implementation of the literacy program among women as a major reason for their departure. In the recalcitrant city of Kandahar three Khalqi KOAW workers were killed as symbols of the unwanted revolution.

As dissention continued to mount, the PDPA initiated steps to create an aura of solidarity. Girls continued to be exploited in a very public manner, in street demonstrations and volunteer projects. Such activity would have been considered

most unbecoming for girls in the past. Now it was not only acceptable, but patriotic. One immediate result of these deviations from traditional behavior patterns was an increase in female aggressiveness, a basic female trait among Afghan women. In the past, however, their assertiveness had been displayed with quiet propriety. Shouting slogans in the streets now gave decorum a new dimension and the girls exploited this first opportunity to express themselves in public by flaunting their sexuality. This was most noticeable at Kabul University where the Khalqi girls were notorious for their un-Afghan forward, unladylike behavior.

Even the most liberal male proponents of emancipation were embarrassed by their brashness. The traditionalists watched with horror and became even more convinced of their contention that if women were educated and allowed to move freely in the society sexual anarchy will indeed be the result. By their unorthodox behavior the Khalqi girls strengthened the traditionalists and dealt a blow to centrist-conservatives and modernists alike.

The DRA abrogated the 1977 Constitution when it came to power and periodically issued decrees to address certain situations.

On 17 October 1978, Decree #7 was issued. Entitled Dowry (Mahr) and Marriage Expenses, its stated purpose was to ensure "equal rights of women with men and in the field of civil law and for removing the unjust patriarchal feudalistic relations between husband and wife for consolidation of further sincere family ties." Considering the lofty goals, Decree #7 was a very sketchy document of only six articles, the shortest decree issued by the DRA. It was inadequate and simplistic, leading observers to suspect it had been hastily compiled with little reflection.

"Article 1. No one shall engage a girl or give her in marriage in cash or commodities." It was well to decree that an unscrupulous father should no longer be allowed to give his daughter to the highest bidder or for payment of debts without considering her emotional preferences. But in most normal circumstances the exchange is not a "sale" or "wife buying." It compensates for the loss of an economically functioning member of the household, defrays wedding expenses as well as the cost of the goods the bride is expected to bring with her. In most instances the payment equals, or is more than halved, by expenses. To be equitable some limitation on the expectations of the groom's family should have been mentioned. They can be equally exhorbitant.

Until attitudes and attendant practices such as arranged marriages change, the question of prestige can not be discounted when considering the well-being of brides. A bride's status and treatment in her new home often depends, rightly or wrongly, on the price she has commanded and the goods she brings with her. Honor, too, is involved. If a father accepts too small an amount it would appear he does not value his daughter. If she arrives without the clothes and necessities to allow her to move in with pride, her position suffers further.

Article 1 was of dubious value for girls. On the other hand, since the expected payments often delayed marriage for less affluent men until unfairly late in life, the total elimination of the payments was highly advantageous for men.

"Article 2. No one shall compel the bridegroom or his guardians to give holiday presents to the girl or her family." Avaricious mothers of brides-to-be inflict unjust hardship on less than affluent prospective bridegrooms by taking advantage of the custom of considering the fiancee part of the family and therefore entitled to receive gifts on four major religious holidays during each year of the engagement. Again, however, Article 2 makes a short-sighted attempt to right this wrong while

ignoring the situation in many cases where the bride is less than wealthy and dependent upon the usual gift of sets of clothing to complete a suitably prestigeous trouseau. The men win article #2, too.

"Article #3. The girl or her guardian shall not take cash or commodities in the name of dowry (mehr) in excess of the darham according to Shariat which is not more than 300 afs. (ca. US$10) on the basis of the bank rate or silver." The mehr according to Islamic law is the exclusive property of the woman but in practice fathers demand exorbitant sums and appropriate much of it, and husbands frequently neglect to pay it on demand. A predominant number of court cases involving women concern the mehr. The writers of Article 3 attempted to protect men from grasping women; however, Article 3 deprives women of the principal buffer in case of divorce, separation or abandonment as there is no alimony in Islam.

"Article 4. Engagements and marriages shall take place with the full consent of the parties involved: a) no one shall force marriage; b) no one shall prevent the free marriage of a widow or force her into marriage because of family relationships or patriarchal ties; c) no one shall prevent legal marriages on the pretext of engagement, forced engagement expenses, or by using force." The Article is a catch-all listing age-old unjust practices but it does not present guarantees for enforcement. Such simplified legislation can not eliminate the practices; only evolving attitudinal changes can accomplish this important task.

"Article 5. Engagement and marriages for women under 16 and men under 18 are not permissible."

"Article 6. 1) Violators shall be liable to imprisonment from 6 months to 3 years; 2) cash or commodities accepted in violation of the provisions of this decree shall be confiscated."

Hopes that the DRA would affect meaningful direction for the women's rights program were dimmed by the lack of guarantees in Decree #7. Like the pronouncements against child marriages, forced marriages, the leverite and exorbitant bride prices made since the days of Amir Abdur Rahman, Decree #7, by itself, was doomed to be ineffective. Because these customs are so deeply rooted in the culture they are immune to mere legislative reform. A government such as the DRA which professes to have "sprung from the toiling masses," "practiced dialogue with the masses," and "learned from the masses" should have realized that trifling half-heartedly with deep-seated socio-religious customs was courting disaster.

But the DRA "welcomed" Decree #7 with great fanfare. For months government ministries and organizations, schools and factories, workers and peasants, in the capital and in the provinces, staged grand functions, sometimes lasting from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (28 October 1978), ending in marches with "hundreds of thousands" carrying "thousands of photos of Our Great Leader." (8 May 1979) A commemorative stamp was issued.

The speakers, predominantly male, most often touted Decree #7 as a harbinger of cataclysmic change and a "deadly blow to feudalism" which had with a single blow "delivered women from the tyrannical patriarchal relations of the past," and "gained for women and mothers ... full independence and released them from the shameful customs of the medieval ages." Decree #7 "ensured rights of men and women in a real sense" and "for the first time in history ended the practice of selling girls." It was a "chain-breaking" decree which "eliminated feudalistic patriarchal relations" and "delivered millions from outmoded mores and customs." As Professor Mrs. R.S. Siddiqi phrased it: "No more will a girl be plucked from the garden of innocence...

and thrown into the clutches of a blood-thirsty beast and never have the opportunity to develop." (16 November 1978)

There were few such sparks of originality in the rhetoric. The same phrases appeared over and over in speeches delivered at myriad grand functions in Kabul and in the provinces. The PDPA propaganda machine in Kabul was in full swing and the catechized KOAW cadres dutifully mouthed their lessons.

Aside from the rhetoric little positive transpired because Decree #7 set ablaze the already smoldering flare of dissent. Revolts in the countryside continued to escalate and fractious dispute among the leadership paved the way for the rise of Hafizullah Amin (Prime Minister after March 1979), who eliminated Taraki in September 1979. Less and less was said about Decree #7 and the women's movement was kept in low profile. The Marriage Registration office in Kabul which normally took in thousands of afghani a month reported an average take of 160 afs. a month as the end of 1979 approached. Marriages were taking place in local mosques without civil registration and without benefit of Decree #7.[14]

On October 1, 1979 the 58-member Constitution Drafting Committee was appointed. It contained a token number of four women: Miss Fawzia Shahsawari (vice-president of KOAW, on the Committee for Regulating the Political System of the Society); Dr. Miss Aziza (Director of Nursing, who replaced Dilara Mahak as President of KAOW after Taraki was eliminated); Sharin Afzal (President of the Reformatory Schools, on the Committee for the Regulation between the State and Individuals); and Mrs. Alamat Tolqoon (President of Kindergartens, on the Committee for Regulating Foreign Policy and International Affairs). The Working Committee, the Committee for Regulating Administrative Affairs and the Committee for Ensuring Judicial Justice had no female representatives, a deplorable situation since the need to guarantee effectively women's legal rights, eradicating legal injustices and implementing Decree #7, should have been a primary goal of the DRA's legislation.

The government's response to increasing resistance throughout the country with severe repression[15] brought about a breakdown of many fine Afghan traditions. One of the worst to suffer was respect for women. Women seeking the whereabouts of their menfolk from the Ministry of Interior were subjected to abusive language and curtly turned away with such insults as: "Go! find yourself another man." Women and children were imprisoned. There were no trials; no proof of guilt.

The country slid rapidly into chaos. In a desperate attempt to establish solidarity Amin opened the Plenary Session of the National Organization for the Defense of the Revolution (NODR) on 5 December 1979. The 580 delegates, including members of the KOAW, had been selected for their "profound loyalty to the aspirations of the Saur Revolution; their irreconcilability to domestic and foreign enemies; political and social piety, and popularity." It was at this time that reportedly "20,000 crusading compatriots were armed." (11 December 1979)

DAOW/PARCHAM: 27 December 1979 - ???

In less than a month the Russians invaded; Hafizullah Amin was killed and Babrak Karmal returned to become Prime Minister, General Secretary of the PDPA and President of the Revolutionary Council. Dr. Anahita was appointed a Basic Member of the Politburo of the PDPA Central Committee (PDPA/CC), a member of the Revolutionary Council of the DRA (RC/DRA) and Minister of Education. Two other women were appointed to the RC/DRA with Dr. Anahita: Miss Soraya, reappointed President of the DAOW which re-

gained its pre-Khalq name, and Jamila Palwasha from the Ministry of Education and a prominent leader in the DOAW, who was also an alternate member of the PDPA/CC. The leading women under the Taraki-Amin Khalq regime disappeared from public view.

Again women were called to support the nation and the "Glorious 27 December Uprising." (8 September 1980) On 1 January 1980 Babrak issued a "Message to Oppressed Women and Mothers of the Homeland" in which he noted that "our heroic women sometimes fought foreign invaders ... with spears and pick axes ... and with their pride and chastity supplied water to ghazis (heros) on the battlefield, and at other times hit the enemy passing through the streets with rocks and clods of earth... It is the women of the homeland who push the cradles of our children ... it is the duty of the revolutionary government of Afghanistan to guarantee the rights and freedom of women in all social, political, cultural and other spheres of life. Women of Afghanistan!, defend the dignity and honour of your homeland!"

The verbal attacks on Amin's excessive repressions were even more venomous than those previously directed against the defunct "feudals." All the attacks were vehement, but the most vitriolic denouncements came from Dr. Anahita who upheld the tradition that Afghan women are implacable when aroused. She characterized Amin as a "cruel and criminal murderer with a fraudulent devil's soul," "a savage despot with ruthless fascistic manners," "a beastly lunatic," guilty of "savage acts of looting, killing and outraging the honor of the suffering and noble people of Afghanistan in order to keep his throne" - and much, much more. (2 January 1980) Her phrases were less elegant than those of past poet-heroines, but they were certainly rousing.

The daily newspapers carried pictures and accounts of the countless women who had been jailed and subjected to attacks "violating human dignity." A "Message to Mothers," published on 15 January 1980 appealed to raw emotions by calling on women "who know that those who have been martyred in the glorious struggle against the bloody beast-like fascist and dark-hearted murderer have spiritual links with the sisters and mothers of this land. Come!, and take part in the mourning ceremonies of this day, the day of martyrs and the day of renewal of pact and oath for revolutionary struggles and lament over the martyred heroes!"

The DRA had declared Mothers' Day, previously celebrated on 14 June, as "null and void" in June 1978. They held that in the past the Women's Association had observed Mothers' Day "in a deceitful manner, unmindful of the conditions of millions of toiling women." Instead, International Women's Solidarity Day (IWSD), initiated by the International Conference of Women Socialists in 1910 in Copenhagen, would be observed on 8 March each year because it marked "the solidarity of women in their struggle against tyranny and imperialism, discrimination and racism, and highlighted freedom and equality. (17 June 1978)

Gala functions were held to celebrate the 70th anniversary of ISWD on 8 March 1980 and the DRA issued a message to Afghan women:

> The PDPA/CC, RC and DRA present their best wishes to the DOAW, and other toiling and patriotic women. On this day on which all mothers and sisters from all nationalities rally behind the PDPA, the RC and the DRA to intensify the struggle against the enemies .. and consolidate women's solidarity with the toiling women of the socialist countries and other countries in the world.
>
> The DOAW during more than 15 years of its existence as an organized and militant vanguard organization of the working women of Afghanistan has carried out different tasks with revolutionary valorous struggles against despotism, reaction and imperialism and fearlessly performed its duty in awakening the

political and class consciousness of the toiling people ... to break the chains of feudal despotism, making continuous efforts to ensure the vast participation of women in social affairs."

The format of the celebrations which greeted International Women's Solidarity Day mirrored those held to welcome Decree #7, now conspicuously unmentioned. The grandest function, held at the Polytechnic Gymnasium and graced by one of Mrs. Babrak Karmal's rare ceremonial appearances, passed the following resolution:

"Resolution: We candidly and unreservedly support the New Phase of the evolution of the Saur Revolution brought about by the PDPA led by Babrak Karmal, which is a great turning point in the socio-political life of our society and has saved large masses of our toiling people from the abyss of destruction and has opened vistas of prosperity to the toiling people of our country. We condemn the adventurous and irresponsible policy of the American reactionaries, China and Pakistan, Egypt and Israel who infiltrate bandits and anti-revolutionaries into Afghanistan and continue false propaganda against the Afghan revolution and disinterested assistance of the Soviet Union to Afghanistan."

The use of the DAOW for disseminating political propaganda continued to be prominent but the DRA also held that: "One important criteria of a progressive regime is the efforts it makes to ensure equality between males and females. ... it was not religion that stood against women's progress... for Islam made learning incumbent upon both men and women ... but men used women as second-rate citizens and did not allow them to acquire knowledge and therefore women are not aware of their rights." (Editorial, 16 March 1980)

Literacy continued to be hailed as imperative for the socialization of the populace. In May 1980 (28th) the DRA announced its goal to eliminate illiteracy completely in the cities in 7 years, and in the provinces in 10 years. The DOAW and DOAY were assigned decisive roles in this project. In an interview with Soviet Women (#5, 1980) in February 1980, Dr. Anahita deplored "some errors, in particular the compulsory education of women. The reactionary elements immediately made use of these mistakes to spread discontent among the population, In this connection the former leadership of the Ministry of Education slowed down to some extent the solution of the problem of eliminating illiteracy." However, in May 1980 she quoted some remarkable statistics. "At present," she said, "500,000 have completed literacy training in 27,000 courses throughout the country. Further, 12,500 literacy courses have been set up in the army where about 200,000 soldiers have achieved literacy." (29 May 1980) As usual Afghan statistics are incredulous. In the best days the Afghan army never consisted of more than 100,000 men and by May 1980 desertions had considerably depleted its ranks. Significantly, when stating the goal of education of all males in Afghanistan between the ages of 10 and 50, Dr. Anahita omitted any reference to women.

The media contributed some constructive education through women's programs on radio and TV. The Kabul New Times published a weekly page for women. Many of the articles were inane. But the interviews with Afghan women, from housewives to factory workers, discussing successes in employment situations as well as frustrations and maltreatment, arranged and forced marriages, problems with mothers-in-law and nagging extravagant husbands, were full of substance. Articles on women's movements in other countries continued Mahmud Beg Tarzi's vision seven decades earlier. Practical problems for women were also featured, such as the activities and services of the Family Guidance Association (established in 1968).

Most heartening, a special reporter was assigned to the Family Court. The Special Court for Family Affairs, the inspiration of the late Justice Ghulam Ali Karimi in 1975 and one of the more positive accomplishments of the women's movement, continued to function. The court is customarily headed by a male religious judge and includes a male and female judge trained in secular law as well as Islamic jurisprudence. The Kabul New Times carried case histories of women seeking divorce or redress for maltreatment by husbands and in-laws. The court attempts to affect reconciliation and, significantly, it is generally the women who are asked to return to their husbands. These articles were both positive and educational. No amount of rhetoric could accomplish what these straight-forward interviews achieved.

In June 1980 a staff reporter for the women's page made some refreshingly honest and pertinent remarks: "There is nothing more ridiculous than granting privileges on paper without pushing them through practically ... there must be an effective law-enforcing apparatus to put into effect each right granted ... so that every man who does not believe in women's attitudes may be convinced that he is wrong ... if women are too passive ... no amount of legislation can help them ... in order to raise the status of women we must first raise the standards of their men." (16 June 1980) Unfortunately, beginning in July 1980 the women's page was gradually preempted by a variety of topical features, such as the Moscow Olympics.

Despite the government's attempts to appear to be functioning normally and implementing progressive programs, the presence of the Soviets in Afghanistan was an anathema. Disaffection mounted in the countryside and the cities rapidly eroding Parcham's political base, particularly among university and college students who were originally Parcham's staunchest supporters. The very girls who had been most revolutionary and politically militant became decidedly unrevolutionary, reticent and obstructive. They were disillusioned by the empty rhetoric, shocked and betrayed by the Soviet invasion. Any euphoria that was left faded as Khalq and non-party members were arrested in increasing numbers.

On 27 April 1980 the citizens of Kabul were called out to applaud a parade of Afghan, Soviet and Soviet-bloc dignitaries celebrating the 2nd anniversary of the Saur Revolution. Suddenly a girl, named Nahed, began calling anti-government, anti-Soviet slogans. Others joined her and the clamor increased. Bricks and stones flew towards the cavalcade; shots followed from diehard party members and militiamen. When the riot was finally brought under control some 70 lay dead, Nahed among them. She has now joined the ranks of Afghanistan's heroines as the new Malalay.

Having sparked the resistance movement in Kabul, the girls capitalized on their recent experiences in the streets and almost daily organized demonstrations and processions. Jeering at the police and soldiers sent to break up the demonstrations, the girls snatched off the caps of the men and threw them their chadors (head scarves) calling: "Here!, wear these. Go!, shut yourselves up in your houses. We!, girls, will defend the motherland!"[16]

As the demonstrations continued in defiance of government prohibitions, on through May and June, hundreds of girls were carted off to jail. The unmanly, disrespectful treatment of girls, in addition to increasing incidents of abuse by Russian soldiers, fanned the emotions of Afghan men. The men sent to subdue the girls were beset with conflicting emotions between duty and traditional respect for women. A taxi driver cried in shame as he watched girls fighting "like cats" as they were manhandled into a police van. Fear and a sense of helplessness stayed him from his normal inclination to go to their rescue. An Afghan policeman taking six girls in for questioning refused to hand them over to four Russian soldiers who demanded them and shot the

Russians himself rather than subject the girls to insult.[17]

The girls remained defiant in spite of the arrests and violence. In the provincial capital of Mazar-i-Sharif women demonstrated in protest after Russian soldiers stomped through the women's section of the sacred shrine of Hazrat Ali without removing their shoes.

Assaults on female honor caused the Russians to be regarded with revulsion and fear. Women sent requests to the mujahideen (freedom fighters) for small pistols with silencers which they could carry under their chadris. Bodies of Russians were found in the streets with increasing frequency. Some fathers with young daughters opted for exile, saying: "We have nothing left ... but still we Afghans know how to save the honor of our women."[18]

In the very conservative city of Kandahar the protection of honor took more drastic forms. When rumors circulated that Russian troops had entered the city, two men killed all the women in their families to prevent them from dishonor. These acts infected the entire city, prompting one girl to send a desperate call for protection to her brother in Kabul. When he arrived he found his two brothers stationed on the roof armed with knives, watching for the first sign of a Russian at which, they had vowed, they would kill their women.

The Kabul brother, known for his liberal views, was powerless. He sent for two of the most conservative members of the family who argued successfully that although men were bound by Islam to protect their women to the death, it was incumbent upon the women to protect themselves should their male protectors die. To kill women in anticipation of dishonor, they said, was unIslamic.[19]

By bringing the most fanatic attitudes toward women to the surface the revolution had seriously jeopardized women. It had so widely polarized conservatives and modernists that fundamentalist reaction threatens to destroy previous accomplishments of the women's movement.

Dissidence also appeared in less violent forms. Women in government offices began slow-downs, particularly in the Ministry of Education's literacy program. Books and papers were purposefully delayed, misdirected, lost or damaged. More than the usual time was spent in the office gossiping, knitting and thumbing through magazines. False attendance reports were submitted.[20] These actions were as courageous as the public demonstrations for informers, anxious to enhance their positions with the authorities, were turning people in everywhere.

The mujahideen encouraged noncooperation by girls in the areas they controlled. On taking over the Ningrahar University in Jalalabad they asked girls to return to their homes in order to protest the Russian occupation. They promised to reinstate education for girls after the foreigners were expelled and paid the girls' transportation costs plus 200 afs. spending money for each.[21]

Conflicting views on the role of women, particularly their education, constitutes one of the more devisive ideological controversies among the resistance groups. Among the refugees, fundamentalist attitudes prevail and those professing liberal views on women risk being branded as traitors and collaborators. This has given rise to the belief that the mujahideen leaders totally reject education for women. The most conservative groups call for women to return to the veil but also hold that women have "the right" to education and work opportunities, in separate institutions.[22] The more liberal manifestos pledge basic freedoms for individuals, free and universal

suffrage; compulsory education of all Afghan school age children; social and economic justice and political freedoms and opportunity for "all Afghans, men and women, to participate individually or collectively in the affairs related to the welfare of Afghanistan;" and "that every individual is entitled to a fair and impartial trial ... with an opportunity to defend himself or herself and demand the process of law."[23]

Legend and fact combine in the accounts of women in the resistance movement. Nuristani women were credited with destroying the first Afghan patrol to be annihilated. The government credited the Nuristani muhajideen, but in Kabul many believed the story that Nuristani women hidden in trees pretending to pick walnuts did the deed. The patrol had been taken unawares, so goes the story, because it would have been disrespectfully unAfghan of the soldiers to glance up at the women. Fact or fiction, the story enhances the reputation of Afghan women for being fierce, indomitable foes.[24] Widows lament that they have been denied the honor of becoming shaheed (martyrs), and plead for guns to fill the empty hands of their infant sons to revenge the deaths of the fathers.[25] In his 1 January message to women, Babrak had called upon this acknowledged quality in women to defend the honor and dignity of the nation. The women have responded but not entirely as Babrak intended.

The innate courage of Afghan women has been exemplified by many wives and mothers who have encouraged their men to flee arrest while they remained behind to sell property and wind up other affairs. They faced alone the hazards of crossing the border illegally. In the Kandahar area a band of female smugglers assists these women.

The revolution has split many families in more permanent ways. Women unable to countenance life under Russian domination have left husbands who elected to cooperate with the regime. One wife sent the wedding ring she had worn for 14 years back to her husband with the message: "Come with this ring - or forget me." Meanwhile she struggles to make a new life for herself and her two young sons while she assists the refugees. When congratulated on her courage, her eyes flashed as she said: "But I must be strong. For my sons and for my country. But I can make it! And so can Afghanistan!" [26]

While the women in the resistance movement consolidate their positions, the Babrak regime offers women only token representation; women as a group are still largely excluded from positions of real power. With the exception, of course, of Dr. Anahita, Member of the PDPA Central Committee Politburo, Member of the DRA Revolutionary Council, Minister of Education, President of the DRA Peace, Solidarity and Friendship Organization and President of the DOAW. She greets all foreign dignitaries, addresses major meetings and makes frequent trips abroad. Two other women sit with Dr. Anahita on the Revolutionary Council, Miss Soraya and Jamila Palwasha, who is also an alternate member of the PDPA Central Committee.

However, the Babrak regime has made increasingly frantic attempts to enlist women in its desperate fight for survival. The 4th Seminar of the DOAW, held in Kabul on 2 September 1980, was directed "to search for scientific ways to mobilize the enlightened women of Afghanistan." The DOAW, the prime institution promoting women, was defined as:

"the voice calling upon women to struggle against the counter-revolution ... to safeguard the gains of the revolution. Your true sons ... have pledged to irrigate with their blood the true hope which is blossoming in our country and will not allow the autumn to plunder the blossoms of the hope of toilers... As a mother, as a sister, and as a woman you should not leave your sons alone on the long path of struggle for safeguarding the gains of the revolution that for the first time in history ... has declared in the laws the equality of the rights of women with men." ("DOAW's Call on Heroic Women"; 8/30/80)

On the 20th of November, 1980 the 1st Conference of the City Council of Representatives of the Women of Kabul City was organized by the DOAW specifically "to organize the women of Afghanistan in defending the revolution." A major objective of this conference was "to further expand the closed ranks of militant women in the country" and elect representatives to a Nation-Wide Conference on Afghanistan's women.[27]

This Nation-Wide Conference, the first international seminar on women to be held in Afghanistan, was entitled "Unity and Solidarity of the Ranks of International Democratic Women and its Role in Mobilizing the Progressive Forces of the World." It was opened with great fanfare by Babrak Karmal on 28 November, 1980 in the Salaam Khana, Amir Abdur Rahman's Durbar Hall now the headquarters of the DRA Revolutionary Council. Dr. Anahita was in the chair. Nineteen foreign delegations and international organizations attended, including Angola, Britain, Bulgaria, Chile, Cuba, Czechoslavakia, Democratic Republic of Germany, Ethiopia, Kampuchea, Mexico, Mongolia, PLO, Poland, South Africa, Soviet Union, Vietnam, the All-African Women's Organization, and the International Democratic Women's Federation. Twelve Afghan women "represented various strata of Kabul." (30 Nov,; 1 Dec.)

The PDPA CC's message to the seminar pointed out that the seminar was being held "under sensitive ... conditions ... when, with the victory of the glorious and liberating uprising of December 27, the new evolutionary phase of the Saur Revolution emerged." After reiterating the Party's duty to implement the DRA's Fundamental Principles, it continues: "Under the present circumstances the training of sacrificing and firm adherents to ... the Saur Revolution ... is the great duty... and prideful responsibility of every mother. The Party and State will never spare any help to mothers in this noble task." It further pledged that along with developing the national economy, industry and agriculture the PDPA will set up "kindergartens, nurseries, schools, hospitals and clubs" and attempt to attract women to take an active part in "social life and productive affairs" to build a new society.

The message then digresses to praise Babrak's visit to the USSR (October 1980), the PDPA's link with world revolutionary processes and consolidation of world peace and Afghan support of "the untiring efforts of the Soviet Union ... in their struggle for peace, detente, and complete and general disarmament." Finally, returning to the subject, it expressed the Party's appreciation for "the activities of the DOAW towards organizing the women of the country, consolidating solidarity with the women of the world, and their struggle for the prosperity and tranquility of peoples, limitation of the arms race, prevention of the threat of war, and ensuring freedom, democracy and progress." (30 November) Quite some tasks for the beleaguered women's movement of Afghanistan.

The first day ended with a concert and a fashion show of local costumes and modern dress.

The concluding session on November 30 was again attended by Babrak but Dr. Anahita was the main speaker. Her long, long [28] speech included fulsome thanks to Babrak and the PDPA CC for their support of the women's movement, for "the aid of the brotherly people of the Soviet Union," and quotes from Brezhnev on the "victories gained" by Babrak's visit to the USSR. Acknowledging the role women had played in the historic struggle for national liberation, she pointed out that "it should be admitted that the force of revolution is not standing on its foot" and exhorted "enlightened women" to go out "to raise the level of political and social consciousness and disclose the real nature of the reactionary, plundering circles, of thieves, rebels and collaborators" (1 Dec.), described in the speeches by foreign delegates as "US imperialists, Chinese chauvanists, and reactionary circles of the region and of the world." (30 Nov.)

With warmth and fervor she concluded: "Let the enemy die because we are undefeatable." (4 Dec.)

The Seminar issued a message to "the noble women, gallant mothers and tortured sisters of the country," (2 Dec.) and announced the resolutions it had passed unanimously (Appendix I). Dr. Anahita was unanimously elected President of the DOAW (1 Dec.), with a 46-member Central Council, also elected unanimously. Representatives of DOAW Central Councils "in the provinces will be elected later," they announced. (1 Dec.)

The feminist movement in Afghanistan has, therefore, become inextricably enmeshed with the political fortunes of individual leaders - and with foreign invaders well-versed in directional indoctrination. The promised cataclysmic changes have not materialized. The psychological relationships between men and women have not been altered. By allowing themselves to be manipulated as tools of party politics, the militant activists subordinate the women's movement to male domination, adding a sinister dimension to the traditional "patriarchal" attitudes their rhetoric condemns. After a century of liberalizing effort Afghan women still struggle to be recognized as individuals rather than stereotypes and symbols.

NOTES

1. Kakar, Hasan Kawun. Government and Society in Afghanistan. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979, p. 173.

2. Schinasi, May. Afghanistan at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century. Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1979, p. 212. For a general discussion of women in this and subsequent periods see: N.H. Dupree, "Behind the Veil in Afghanistan" in Asia, vol. 1, no. 2, July/August 1978, pgs. 10-15.

3. For the Amanullah period, see: Leon Poullada, Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-1929, Cornell University Press, 1973; Rhea Talley Stewart, Fire in Afghanistan, Doubleday, New York, 1973.

4. Anis, as quoted in Women in Afghanistan: A Progress Report, Ministry of Information and Culture, Kabul, 1977, p.9. This publication was never released, but one copy is available with this author.

5. ibid. , p. 9.

5a. For the Nadir period, see: Helen Woodsmall, Women and the New East, Part IV: 151-196. Washington D.C., The Middle East Institute, 1960.

6. Dupree, Louis. "The Burqa Comes Off," American Universities Field Staff (AUFS) Reports, vol. III, no. 2, 1959; and Afghanistan, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 249.

7. Dupree, Louis. "Red Flag over the Hindu Kush Part II: The accidental coup, or Taraki in Blunderland," AUFS Reports, Asia, no. 45; 1979.

8. Democratic Republic of Afghanistan Annual, Ministry of Information and Culture, April 1979, p. 67-70.

9. All date references in text are to The Kabul Times (Kabul New Times after 1 January, 1980).

10. Dupree, Louis. "Red Flag Over the Hindu Kush Part V: Repression, or security through Terror purges I-IV," AUFS Reports, Asia, no. 28, 1980.

11. All incidents such as these discussed in text are from personal communications with Afghan refugees and mujahideen.

12. Quoted by Dr. Anahita in Soviet Woman, No.5, 1980.

13. Personal communication. See note 11.

14. ibid.

15. Dupree, Louis, "Red Flag Over the Hindu Kush Part VI: Repressions, or security through terror purges IV-VI," AUFS Reports, Asia, no. 29, 1980.

16. Personal communication. See note 11.

17. ibid.

18. Report from Delhi, The Pakistan Times, vol. xxxiv, no. 129, 13 June 1980, p.l.

19. Personal communication. See note 11.

20. ibid.

21. ibid.

22. Aims of Hezb-i-Islami Afghanistan.

23. Manifesto of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan.

24. Rudyard Kipling expressed British dread of Afghan women on the warpath thus: (The Young British Soldier, Rudyard Kipling's Verse, p. 416)

When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains
And the women come out to cut up what remains
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier.

25. Personal communication. See note 11.

26. ibid.

27. The first of a veritable bombardment of conferences called as the first anniversary of the Russian invasion approached (24 December 1980). Tribal groups and special interest groups were gathered in Kabul so that Babrak could make impassioned, personal appeals for the support of his National Fatherland (no longer the Motherland) Front. For instance: 5 Dec., the Bushkashi teams composed of Uzbeks and Turkomen from the north, to whom Dr. Anahita was selected to present the winning trophies!; 6 Dec., Nuristanis; 8 Dec., Safi Pushtun; 11 Dec., 1stCongress of Agricultural Cooperatives; 15 Dec., Afridi and Shinwari Pushtun; etc., etc., etc.

28. Part I (1 Dec.); Part II (2 Dec.); Part III (3 Dec.); Part IV (4 Dec.).

APPENDIX I

Resolutions of the Nation-Wide Conference
of Afghanistan's Women: 28-30 November 1980
(Kabul New Times, 1 December 1980: p.4)

We have decided to:

1. Promote the role of Afghanistan's women in defence of the gains of the Saur Revolution, develop work methods among women, train women with high spirit of social awareness and sense of responsibility for the destiny of the homeland and work and cooperate closely with the democratic youth organisations, unions of workers and other social organizations to achieve these ends.

2. Be always decisive against the enemies of revolution, always distinguish the attempts and strides of the enemy made against the unity of the progressive forces and take active part with our untiring work and activity in consolidating and harmonizing all the progressive forces of the DRA on the basis of the principle of service to the people and sense of patriotism.

3. Take part in actions taken for the gradual and stage by stage attraction of women to the process of social production, ensuring the right of women to work as a main condition for economic independence of women, equality of them in family and society. Teach women to strengthen national economy and prosperity by their fruitful work and help in realisation of the economic and social programme of the new evolutionary phase of Saur Revolution which is aimed at raising the living standard of toilers.

4. Actively take part in the campaign against illiteracy and organize groups of housewives by working with them, teaching them, and talking with them individually in their houses in order to attract women to this process. This task should be fulfilled on voluntary basis and with due account of the special conditions and national and local traditions.

5. Pay attention to the promotion of cultural level of women and see that they get access to education and acquire vocational know-how in the factories and special centers including villages and rural areas.

6. Take initiative in advancing specific proposals to the state authoritative organs for the future promotion of laws on women's work, payment of wages to them, work security and child and mother care.

7. Take care of the health and education of children and help in the promotion of the material level of the life of families, take active and great part in measures taken to help mothers in raising their children and cooperate in the development of state systems devised for child and mother care, expansion of service network for children and mothers such as kindergartens, nurseries, hospitals, family guidance centres and other social institutions.

8. Strengthen our solidarity with the world women in struggle for peace, relaxation of tension and prevention of horrible arms race and atomic conflict. Take part in campaigns and solidarity meetings and get Afghan women acquainted with the life and activity of the women of other countries of the world, increase exchange of visiting delegations and cooperate in regional and international meetings and gatherings held for the purpose of mutual cooperation and development of friendly relations, and take part in the struggle for solving the acute problems of our present day life in the interest of all peoples.

9. Expand our mutual friendship and cooperation with the women of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries and all progressive and democratic organisations of the world women for the purpose of profound acquaintance with the working methods among the women and learning their experiences in solving problems related to women and gains achieved by the peoples of these countries in their struggle for democracy and social justice.

